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ABSTRACT

This report compares two studies, one conducted in 1993 and the other in 1996, that examined public attitudes toward higher education in California. Grouping the findings as enduring values, changing concerns, and "dealing with the next tidal wave," the report concludes that Californians: believe education is essential for a decent job and middle-class lifestyle; believe that no qualified or motivated person should be denied an education for lack of money; are less anxious in 1996 than in 1993 about access to education, and less likely to call for fundamental overhaul of the public higher education system; are more resistant to price increases; are more likely to value a college education for what is learned; support more effective use of higher education facilities and making college-level courses available to high school seniors; support building new campuses and allowing students to go to private institutions; support the use of new technologies; favor supporting students rather than institutions; do not want to limit access; and have mixed reactions on who should bear responsibility for change. A special section focuses specifically on Latinos' views of higher education, noting that they are more likely than the population at large to view higher education as extremely important. (CH)

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ENDURING VALUES, CHANGING CONCERNS

What Californians Expect from Their Higher Education System

A Report from

THE CALIFORNIA HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY CENTER

March 1997

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Enduring Values, Changing Concerns

What Californians Expect from Their Higher Education System

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With an Afterword by Deborah Wadsworth

This report is based on a research study designed and conducted by
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For The California Higher Education Policy Center

March 1997

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Executive Summary

Twelve findings have emerged from this study of Californians, conducted in the fall of 1996, and a comparison of these results to a related study Public Agenda conducted in 1993.

Enduring Values

Finding One: A college or university education is essential for a decent job and a middle-class lifestyle. By margins of more than six to one (78 percent to 12 percent), Californians believe that young people will have better job prospects if they go on to college than if they take job offers right out of high school.

Finding Two: No one who is qualified and motivated should be denied a college education because of lack of money. Eighty-one percent of Californians believe we should not allow the price of a college education to keep students who are qualified and motivated to go to college from doing so.

Finding Three: A successful college education depends on the motivation and dedication that a student brings to it. Seventy-five percent believe the benefit a student gets from attending college mostly depends upon how much of an effort he or she puts into it.

Changing Concerns

Finding Four: While Californians are still deeply concerned about access to higher education, they are less anxious than they were in 1993. During our first study, Californians were experiencing both a prolonged recession and unprecedented hikes in fees for public higher education. Californians felt trapped in a situation where a college education was both increasingly important and increasingly inaccessible. Today the state's economy is much stronger and college fee increases have been frozen for the last several years. As a result, anxiety has dropped considerably compared to what we saw three years ago. The percentage of people who feel getting a college education has become more difficult than it was 10 years ago now stands at 54 percent, as compared to 67 percent who felt this way in 1993.

Finding Five: Californians are now less likely to call for a fundamental overhaul of the state's public higher education system. In 1993, 64 percent said that they wanted to see the state's public higher education system fundamentally overhauled. Today, presumably in response to decreased anxiety about higher education, that percentage has dropped to 44 percent.

Finding Six: Although Californians are now less anxious about access to higher education, they are more resistant to price increases. Sixty-four percent say it is a poor idea to raise college prices, up from 52 percent in 1993.

Finding Seven: Californians are now more likely to value college education for what is learned. The percentage of Californians who believe too many people are going to college instead of attending alternatives to college, such as trade schools, has dropped from 54 percent in 1993 to 41 percent today.

Dealing With Tidal Wave II

Many observers believe California's higher education institutions will soon be faced with a second "tidal wave" of students comparable in size to the arrival of the baby-boomers in the late sixties. This study asked Californians how the state should respond to this projected onslaught.

Finding Eight: Californians strongly support more effective use of existing higher education facilities and making more college-level courses available to high school students. Ninety-five percent of Californians favor the idea of offering more classes in the evening and over the summer and 87 percent support encouraging high school students to take more college-level courses so they can spend less time in college.

Finding Nine: Californians also support building new campuses, allowing students to go to private institutions, and using new technologies. Forty-three percent strongly support building new campuses and 32 percent somewhat support this idea; 39 percent strongly support, and 35 percent somewhat support, using scholarship money to help students attend private colleges to free up space at public universities; an almost equally large percentage say that they want colleges to utilize new technologies.

Finding Ten: Californians favor supporting students rather than supporting institutions. Fifty-two percent say if the state government has more money for college education it should give that money to qualified students in scholarships for public or private schools rather than giving it to public colleges directly.

Finding Eleven: For Californians, the least acceptable approach is limiting access. By margins of two to one (61 percent to 32 percent) Californians oppose the idea of accepting a smaller percentage of the people who apply to the public colleges and universities.

Finding Twelve: Who should bear the responsibility for necessary changes? Fifty percent think colleges and universities should teach more classes and cut costs, as compared to 46 percent who think the state should spend more in tax money and 23 percent who want to see students and their parents pay higher fees.

Introduction

In 1993, Public Agenda reported on how Californians view their system of public higher education in a report entitled *The Closing Gateway*. That study, based on opinions of 832 state residents in the fall of 1993, provided a snapshot of Californians' attitudes and concerns at that time. But which attitudes were enduring and which were likely to change in response to new events and developments? To examine these questions, Public Agenda revisited many of the same issues with another 800 Californians in the fall of 1996, producing the results found in this report, *Enduring Values, Changing Concerns*. This report also includes a number of new survey questions and it supplements the findings with open-ended telephone interviews in which some survey participants elaborate on their views.

Some public attitudes have changed dramatically while others remain rock solid. Distinguishing among these issues offers a more complete picture of how Californians view the state's public higher education system.

The three years between these studies have been eventful ones for California and for its higher education system. *The Closing Gateway* was conducted during a seemingly endless recession and at a time of unprecedented increases in college tuition and fees. Today, the economy is considerably brighter, and fees at public colleges and universities have been virtually frozen for the past few years. In response to these differences, some public attitudes have changed dramatically while others remain rock solid. Distinguishing among these issues offers a more complete picture of how Californians view the state's public higher education system.

In Part One of this report, we discuss the enduring values that seem to underlie Californians' views on higher education. In Parts Two and Three, we report on circumstances and attitudes that have changed over the last few years as California has entered better economic times. Part Four looks at attitudes about the future of California's higher education system.

PART ONE

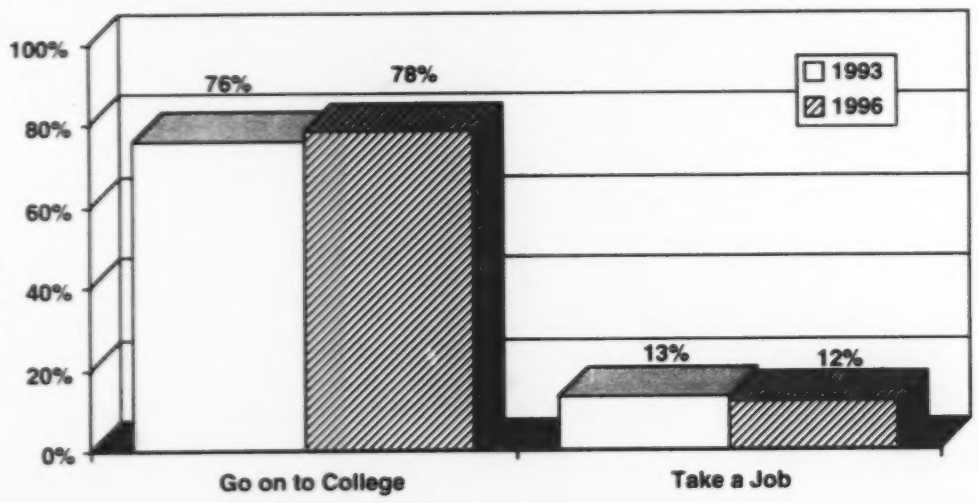
Enduring Values

Finding One: A college or university education is essential for a decent job and a middle-class lifestyle.

Californians are more convinced than ever of the importance of a college education. As noted in *The Closing Gateway*, most Californians view a college education as they once viewed a high school diploma: a necessary entrance ticket to a secure middle-class lifestyle. When people say this they do not necessarily mean that a young person has to have a degree from a four-year institution (our survey specifically instructed respondents to include community colleges in their definition of higher education), but they are convinced that without an education beyond high school, a young person is unlikely to get a good job. Specifically, by a margin of more than six to one (78 percent to 12 percent), Californians believe that young people will improve their job prospects by going on to college rather than going from high school into a job (see Figure One). By a margin of two to one (64 percent to 32 percent), which is higher than the margin in 1993, Californians also believe that a college education is necessary for almost everyone (see Table One).

Figure One

The Importance of a College Education



Q: Which comes closer to your view: High school graduates should go on to college because in the long run they'll have better job prospects, OR High school graduates should take any decent job offer they get because there are so many unemployed people already?

Table One
The Importance of a College Education

	1993	1996
To what extent do you think [INSERT GOAL] should be accomplished by a college education?		
% rating goal a 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale where 7 means the goal is *extremely important*:		
Giving students marketable job skills so they can get good jobs when they graduate	80%	79%
Which statement comes closer to your view?		
A college education is necessary for almost everyone	56%	64%
—or—		
A college education is not necessary for many people	39%	32%

When Californians are asked why people should attend college, 79 percent say the most important goal of a college education is to give students "marketable skills so they can get good jobs when they graduate." A Sacramento woman put it this way:

> *Higher education is really important. All of the fields are getting more technical than they ever have been, so it is more important than ever for young people to get an education. And what are young people going to do with their lives if they can't work?*

As Figure One (page 1) and Table One reveal, higher education was extremely important to Californians in 1993. Since then, this support has either remained constant or increased.

Finding Two: No one who is qualified and motivated should be denied a college education because of lack of money.

Californians are also deeply committed to the principle of giving access to higher education for every qualified and motivated young person, regardless of the individual's financial condition. Eighty-one percent say "we should not allow the price of a college education to keep students who are qualified and motivated to go to college from doing so" (see Figure Two). People are convinced that any increase in tuition and fees will prevent people who should be going to college from attending, with 59 percent saying that "raising the price of public colleges and universities will put a college education out of reach for many people who should be going to college."

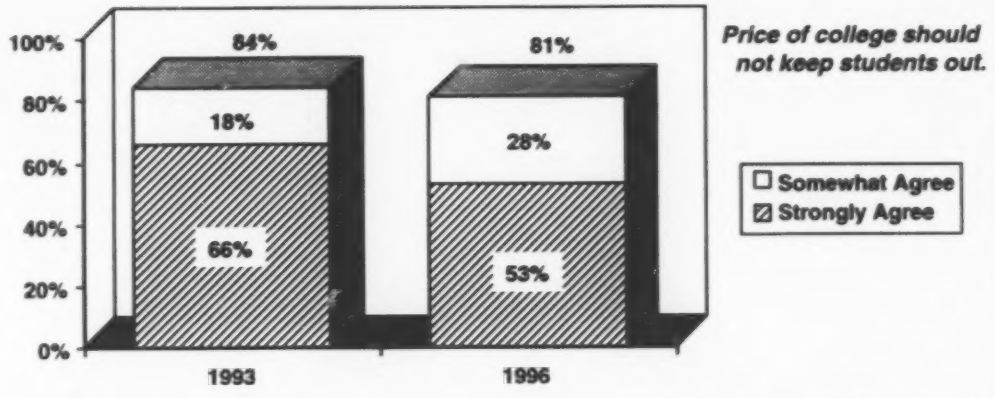
People also fear that a college degree is already out of reach for many people. Fifty-four percent think that getting a college education is more difficult today than it was 10 years ago, while a higher percentage (64 percent) believe it will be even more difficult 10 years from now. Fifty-two percent of Californians believe that there are many people who are qualified for a college education who lack the opportunity to get one. A man from Long Beach said:

> *Everyone should have the opportunity to go to college, whether they can afford to or not. It is good for the country, and it is good for the kids. The world is getting smaller, and we have to be able to compete; the opportunities are not like when my father was a self-made man and could do it by himself.*

Some critics complain that college is becoming available only to the rich who can pay for it and the poor (and minorities) who can get scholarships. The middle class,

Figure Two

A Commitment to Access



Q: We should not allow the price of a college education to keep students who are qualified and motivated to go to college from doing so. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

according to this view, are too poor to afford college but too well-off to qualify for help. Our results suggest that Californians do not share this view. Indeed, they are convinced that low-income people are hardest hit, with 52 percent saying that qualified students from low-income families have less opportunity than others to get a college education (see Table Two). By contrast, only a small percentage of residents (22 percent) say that the middle class has greater problems than other groups. These perceptions are only slightly affected by the income category of the respondent. For example, just 19 percent of middle-class respondents (with a family income from $26,000 to $50,000) say that students from middle-class families have less opportunity to get a college education, yet 56 percent of them voice such concerns about students from lower-income families.

Table Two

Access for Specific Groups

Do you think [INSERT GROUP] have *less opportunity*, *more opportunity* or *about the same opportunity* as others to get a college education?

% saying group has "less opportunity"	*1993*	*1996*
Qualified students from low-income families	61%	52%
Qualified students who are ethnic or racial minorities, such as blacks or Latinos	35%	32%
People who are older and going back for retraining	29%	22%
Qualified students from middle-class families, regardless of their ethnic background	22%	22%

The strength of Californians' commitment to the principle of access is striking. Indeed a substantial number of them stand by their commitment even when told it would drain tax revenues. Specifically, the study asked Californians if they thought the state should maintain its support for access to higher education even if that support "will cost the state and its taxpayers a lot more money." By margins of three to one (54 percent to 18 percent), Californians say it is as important as ever for California to maintain its commitment to access despite its costs. While this finding should not be taken a priori as endorsement of raising taxes for higher education, it does show how strongly they feel about access. We should also point out that 22 percent of Californians admit they are not sure on this issue.

Finding Three: A successful college education depends on the motivation and dedication that a student brings to it.

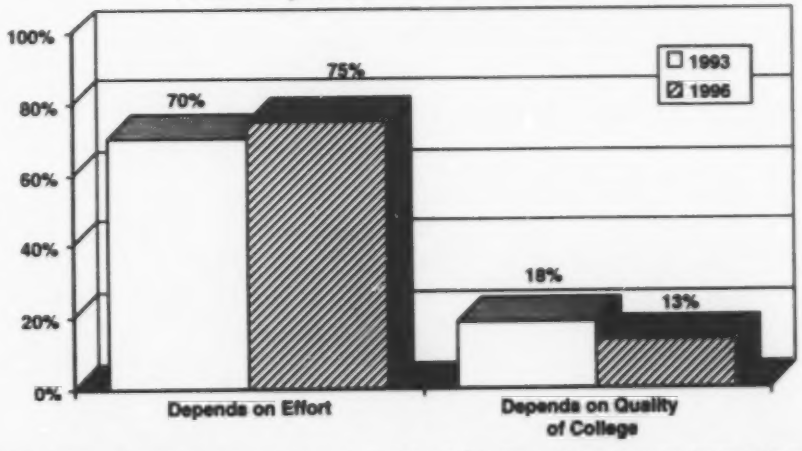
The third enduring theme in this study (and other studies of higher education) concerns the importance of student motivation. People believe that what makes the college experience a success is the energy and dedication that the student brings to the process. In focus groups conducted in 1993, people argued that a good student could get a great deal from even an under-equipped college, while a lackadaisical student would get little even from the best college in the world. That view still exists today. As a 1996 respondent said:

> *The motivation is enormously important; if the student doesn't have that, not much else is going to happen.*

This view contrasts with how Americans look at problems in elementary and secondary public schools, where they tend to place more of the responsibility for failure on teachers and parents. While they acknowledge that many K–12 students are underperforming, they see them more as victims than as responsible parties. When it comes to higher education, however, the public tends to see the students as adults, responsible for their own success.

Figure Three

The Importance of Motivation



Q: Which comes closer to your own view: The benefit a student gets from attending college mostly depends upon the quality of the college he or she is attending, OR The benefit a student gets from attending college mostly depends upon how much of an effort he or she puts in.

There is a strong consensus (75 percent) that the benefit a student derives from college depends mostly upon how much effort he or she contributes (see Figure Three, page 4).

A major test of motivation in the public's view is student willingness to pay at least part of their college expenses. Californians do not feel that students should get a college education for free. As a respondent in *The Closing Gateway* said, "A giveaway is a throwaway." Sixty-six percent of Californians surveyed either somewhat or strongly agree that "students don't appreciate the value of a college education when they have no personal responsibility for paying what it costs."

• • •

All of these core views continue to be strongly held, and it is likely that the California public will evaluate any policy changes with these values in mind. People want a state system that assures every qualified student an opportunity to attend an institution of higher education. They see higher education not as a luxury for the rich, but as a necessity—something that should be available to any student who is motivated and qualified.

PART TWO

A Changing Context

While Californians maintain their strong belief in the importance of higher education, college access, and student motivation, other attitudes about higher education have changed dramatically over the past three years. To understand these changes, it is useful to review some of the striking developments that have occurred in the state's economy and in the price of higher education over this period. These trends appear to have influenced many of the attitudinal changes this study documents.

The Price of Higher Education

The period immediately prior to the 1993 study was characterized by sharp increases in tuition and fees for public education. As Table Three shows, fees for the University of California (UC) and the California State Universities (CSU) nearly doubled during this period. The fees at the California Community Colleges (CCC) went up even more sharply, although they are still much lower than in the other two systems. Compared to this period of steep increases, the years since 1993 have been marked by great stability, with either small tuition/fee increases or no increases at all.

Table Three
Fees per Year

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
UC	$1,624	$2,274	$2,824	$3,454	$3,799	$3,799	$3,799
CSU	$780	$936	$1,308	$1,440	$1,584	$1,584	$1,584
CCC	$100	$120	$210	$390	$390	$390	$390

Source: William Pickens, *Financing the Plan: A Database of Public Finance for Higher Education in California* (San Jose: The California Higher Education Policy Center, 1996).

The State's Economy

In 1993, Californians remained deeply mired in a seemingly endless recession, and the modest economic growth emerging in other parts of the country seemed to be passing the state by. In contrast, the last three years have seen strong improvement in the state's economy, with more jobs being created and new industries replacing some of those that had closed. In fact, as Table Four shows, unemployment peaked at 9.4 percent in 1993, the year Public Agenda conducted *The Closing Gateway* study. Today unemployment stands at 6.9 percent, the lowest rate in the past six years. Employment growth, which was negative in 1993 and the two prior years, has been positive since and was especially high in 1996.

Table Four
Jobs and Unemployment

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Unemployment Rate	5.8%	7.7%	9.3%	9.4%	8.6%	7.8%	6.9%
Rate of Employment Growth	3.9%	-2.2%	-0.2%	-0.4%	1.5%	0.5%	2.1%

*As of October 1996.
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "California Labor Force Statistics Civilian Noninstitutional Population, Seasonally Adjusted," in *Faxstat* (San Francisco: BLS, 1996).

The Closing Gateway, in short, was conducted when Californians were experiencing significant problems, both in the state's overall economy and in rising higher education costs. Since then, the situation has improved considerably.

PART THREE

Changing Concerns

The economic improvements described in Part Two have apparently made Californians more optimistic, which in turn has influenced their views about higher education.

Finding Four: While Californians are still deeply concerned about access to higher education, they are less anxious than they were in 1993.

1993: A Feeling of Desperation. Three years ago, Californians were convinced (as they are now) that a college education was essential to a middle-class lifestyle. At the same time, they were concerned that higher education was slipping out of reach for many Californians. In effect, Californians felt that they were in an intolerable situation, with higher education becoming simultaneously more important and less accessible. Perhaps as a result of this tension, they supported radical changes in the way higher education was delivered in the state. Nearly two-thirds of the Californians surveyed in 1993 (64 percent) felt that the state's public college and university system needed to be "fundamentally overhauled."

In 1993, comparisons of Californians' views to those of Americans nationwide showed that Californians were more anxious about access to higher education and more likely to call for a fundamental overhaul of higher education in their state. (*The Closing Gateway* included both California and national samples.)

1996: Concerned but Less Anxious. The 1996 survey shows that while Californians' concerns about higher education remain high, they have declined from 1993 levels. Still convinced of the importance of a college education, Californians today are less anxious about a young person's opportunity to get one. The tension arising from their dual beliefs—their sense that higher education is absolutely essential and their concerns about access—has eased.

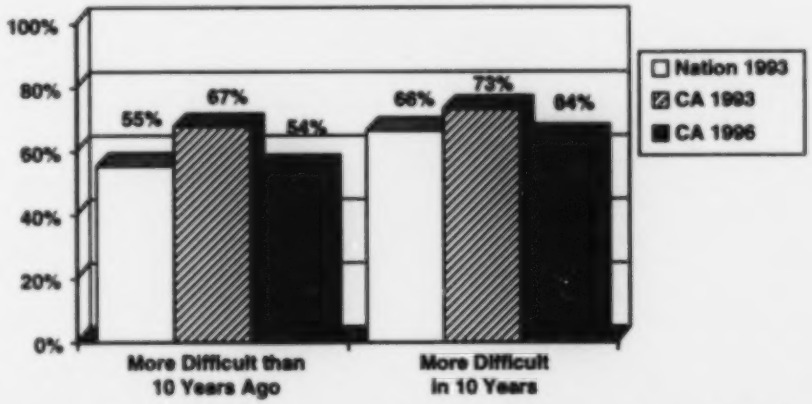
Survey data, of course, do not explain definitively why anxiety has lessened, but the stabilization of tuition and fees must be partly responsible. Earlier price increases, coming during a contracting economy, were widely publicized and obviously made a deep impression—not only on those in college but on many state residents. Today, Californians see a far better set of conditions, with the economy improving and prices remaining stable.

Although still concerned about what the future will bring, Californians are also less pessimistic than they were in 1993; 64 percent say that a college education will be harder to get a decade from now, but this is below the 73 percent who felt this way just three years ago (see Figure Four).

There is also greater optimism regarding educational opportunities for different groups of individuals—poor people, minorities, middle-class people, and older students. In 1996, as in 1993, Californians are primarily concerned about the difficulties poor people face in gaining access to higher education. There is evidence, however, that people today are more sanguine about the ability of poorer families to attend college. In 1993, 61 percent of those surveyed said that poor people had less oppor-

Figure Four

Concerns about Access



Q: In your view, has getting a college education become more difficult than it was 10 years ago, less difficult than it was 10 years ago, or is it about as difficult as it was 10 years ago?
Q: And do you think getting a college education will be more difficult, less difficult, or about the same 10 years from now?

tunity to get a college education; today that number has dropped to 52 percent. Californians are also less likely to emphasize the difficulties of older people who require training. Overall, no group was seen as worse off than it was in 1993, while several groups were perceived as better off (see Table Two, page 3).

In 1993, California citizens were also extremely concerned that the classes many students needed to graduate were not available, with 83 percent describing this as a very serious or somewhat serious problem (see Table Five). Many of our 1993 focus group respondents mentioned seeing news stories about this or having heard anecdotes from students.

Table Five

Access to Classes and Borrowing Money

Do you think [INSERT STATEMENT] is a *very serious, somewhat serious* or *not very serious* problem, or *not a problem at all*, facing California's public college system?	*1993*	*1996*
Students have trouble getting the classes they need in order to graduate		
A very serious problem	56%	40%
A somewhat serious problem	27%	31%
Students have to borrow too much money to pay for their college education		
A very serious problem	50%	45%
A somewhat serious problem	31%	34%

While concern about this problem remains high—71 percent still describe it as a problem—the concern has dropped since 1993.

Californians are also still concerned about students having too many loans. Seventy-eight percent of Californians say this is a problem, although the number of people who describe the problem as "very serious" has dropped from 50 percent in 1993 to 45 percent today (see Table Five, page 9).

Finding Five: Californians are now less likely to call for a fundamental overhaul of the state's public higher education system.

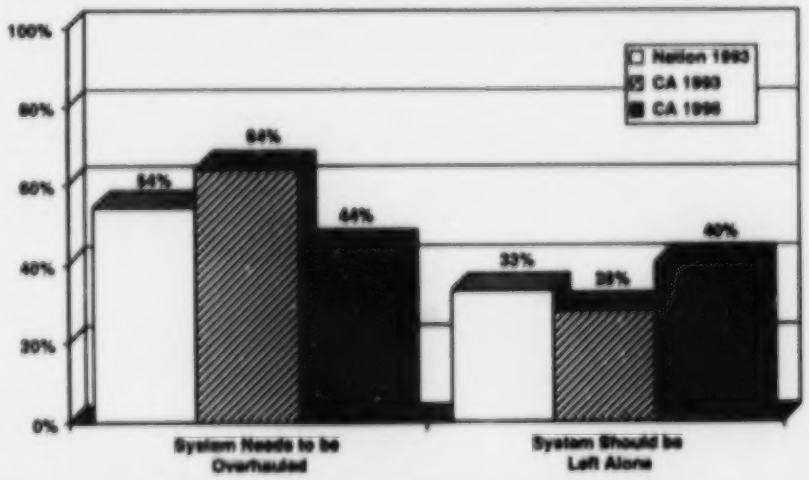
Given the decreasing concerns of Californians about the issues described above, it is not surprising that they are considerably less interested in overhauling their higher education system today than they were several years ago. The percentage of people supporting a fundamental overhaul dropped from 64 percent in 1993 to 44 percent in 1996, the largest single change for any of the survey items (see Figure Five). Today, the thesis that the higher education system should be fundamentally overhauled is debatable in California, with 44 percent of citizens favoring an overhaul and an approximately equal number (40 percent) wanting to leave the system alone.

In open-ended interviews, some people called for moderate rather than extreme reforms. One woman from San Mateo said, "You can't blow up the system; you just need to get in there and help some of those people change their ways." A woman from Sacramento said:

> *I don't see the need for big changes in the higher education system, more like little changes around the edges; a few more trade schools, maybe like we used to have, or higher standards so that some of those athletes who can barely read and write aren't cheating the others out of an education.*

Figure Five

Changes in Demand for a Fundamental Overhaul



Q: Some people think that California's public college and university system needs to be fundamentally overhauled. Other people think that California's public college system should be basically left alone. Which comes closest to your view? [The question for the national sample was tailored to the specific state.]

Table Six **Opposition to Price Increases**		
Do you think [INSERT STATEMENT] is an *excellent, pretty good, only fair,* or *poor* idea for colleges to consider in dealing with financial shortfall?	*1993*	*1996*
Raise college prices even though some people argue that the burden on families and students would be too high		
Poor idea	52%	64%
Only fair idea	26%	21%
Pretty good idea	13%	11%
Excellent idea	7%	3%

Finding Six: Although Californians are now less anxious about access to higher education, they are more resistant to price increases.

Despite the reduced anxiety over access, Californians are now even more concerned about future increases in college tuition and fees. In fact, while economic times are better now, the public is more resistant to price increases today than during the recession. The data suggest that Californians have been burned on this topic—"enough is enough," they seem to be saying—and therefore they are extremely hostile to any increases in the near future (see Table Six).

Public Agenda questioned respondents about a number of potential alternatives that might be enacted in the event that the state reduces its support for higher education. There is strong opposition to raising fees in response to such an eventuality, a resistance that has increased significantly since 1993. One older man from Bakersfield reacted to the idea of price increases this way:

> *Raise fees? They are astronomical already. It isn't like when we sent our kids to college; you could afford it then, and we were able to do it. Today it is a whole different picture.*

There is also a slight decline in the intensity of people's belief that students should bear a portion of college costs. The idea that students should contribute to the cost of their education remains popular, with 66 percent of

Table Seven **Students Paying for Their Own Education**			
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?	*Nation 1993*	*CA 1993*	*CA 1996*
Students don't appreciate the value of a college education when they have no personal responsibility for paying what it costs			
Strongly agree	48%	45%	37%
Somewhat agree	28%	23%	29%
Somewhat agree + strongly agree	76%	68%	66%

Californians still agreeing that "students don't appreciate the value of a college education when they have no personal responsibility for paying what it costs" (see Table Seven, page 11). However, in 1993, 45 percent of respondents strongly agreed with this sentiment; today a somewhat lower 37 percent express this view. Californians may be saying something like this: "It is good for students to pay part of their own education, but they already do; we don't want them to have to bear more of the burden than they are already bearing."

Finding Seven: Californians are now more likely to value college education for what is learned.

In *The Closing Gateway*, we noted that people were extremely concerned about the importance of a college *degree*, but much less committed to the importance of a college education itself. Many respondents interviewed in focus groups felt that a good job requires common sense, motivation, and a strong work ethic, but that most of what an employee needs to know in order to do a job is learned at the workplace—not in college. In fact, there was a widely shared sense that many employers use the requirement of a college degree to screen out job applicants. People often expressed the sentiment that too many people are going to college and that "society has made going to college seem more important than it is."

While the perception that society over-emphasizes a college degree does not make that degree any less important in people's eyes, it can cause frustration and bitterness. In the 1993 focus groups, some Californians who had not attended college themselves spoke with great intensity and bitterness about the promotion of less qualified college graduates at the expense of more qualified and more experienced workers who had not been to college.

Three years have brought some interesting changes. California citizens are now more likely to value what is actually learned at colleges and universities—rather than merely focusing on the diploma. But the biggest change is in the number of Californians who think that too many people attend college.

As Table Eight reveals, in 1993, 54 percent of those surveyed felt that it was a somewhat or very serious problem that "too many people are going to college instead of to alternatives to college where they can learn trades like plumbing or computer repair." Forty-two percent did not see this as a problem. By 1996, the percentages had reversed; 53 percent of Californians now say this is not a problem. Only 41 percent say too many young people

Table Eight
A Move Away from Credentialism

Do you think [INSERT STATEMENT] is a *very serious*, *somewhat serious* or *not very serious* problem, or *not a problem at all*, facing California's public college system?

% saying "very serious" plus % saying "somewhat serious" problem	*1993*	*1996*
Too many people are going to college instead of to alternatives where they can learn trades like plumbing or computer repair	54%	41%
Society has made college seem more important than it really is	55%	49%
A lot of employers hire college graduates for jobs that could be done as well or better by people without a college degree	62%	54%

attend college who don't really need to. One woman explained it this way:

> *Today you have to have a degree to get a decent job, and sometimes that is unfortunate. But college is more than just a degree. It really does expand your mind and your horizons.*

Such attitudes seem to vary with age, with older people much more likely than younger people to feel that too many people attend college. Indeed, only 35 percent of those under 45 consider "over attendance" at college a serious problem, versus 52 percent of those age 45 or older.

The view that society over-emphasizes college also dropped a bit. The percentage of people who believe that society "has made going to college seem more important than it really is" declined from 55 percent in 1993 to 49 percent three years later. Today, the California public is evenly divided on this question, with 50 percent saying that this is not a problem and 49 percent saying that it is.

The view that employers screen out good candidates who lack a college degree still commands a majority, but even here there has been a small decline over the past three years. Today, 54 percent of California residents think it is a serious problem that employers hire college graduates for jobs that could be done as well or better by people without a college degree, somewhat below the 62 percent who felt this way in 1993.

• • •

These findings suggest that Californians increasingly accept the argument that we are facing a new knowledge-intensive workplace, where more is required of a young person than hard work and motivation. There appears to be a growing sense, especially among younger respondents, that students need the skills and knowledge that higher education offers, as well as the credential.

PART FOUR

Dealing with Tidal Wave II

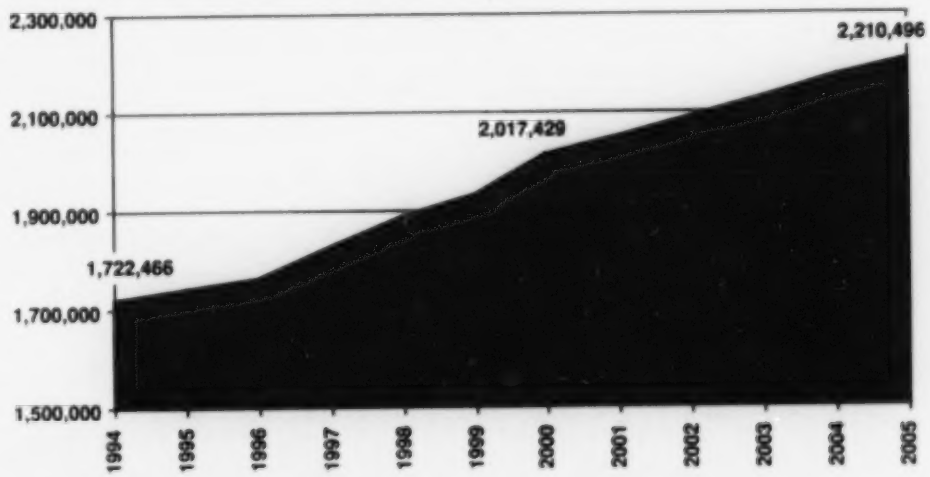
Starting in 1965, and ending in 1975, California's public higher education system experienced a "tidal wave" of new students as baby-boomers graduated from high school and entered state colleges and universities.[1] Many observers believe the system is now beginning to experience another comparable influx ("Tidal Wave II") as a projected half-million new students prepare to enter college during the next decade (see Figure Six). Our findings suggest that the public is concerned about this problem, but does not yet see it as a crisis (see Table Nine, page 16).

Enduring Values, Changing Concerns presented respondents with an array of possible solutions for dealing with Tidal Wave II, ranging from building new campuses to using the Internet for off-campus learning.

As one might expect, Californians' attitudes in this area are guided by the same enduring principles that shape their views on higher education generally. They strongly support steps that increase access to higher education and are especially receptive to solutions that relate to motivation. They are adamant in

Figure Six

Tidal Wave II: 488,000 Additional Students



Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission, *California Public College and University Enrollment Demand, 1994–2005* (April 3, 1995 draft).

[1] Clark Kerr, *Preserving the Master Plan* (San Jose: The California Higher Education Policy Center, 1994) p. 3.

Table Nine **Seriousness of Tidal Wave II**	
In the next 10 years there will probably be a large increase in the number of people who apply and are eligible to go to California's colleges and universities. If this happened, do you think California would be faced with?	*1996*
A crisis	13%
A serious problem	31%
A moderate problem	37%
No real problem at all	17%

opposing anything that decreases access or raises prices for students and their families.

Finding Eight: Californians strongly support more effective use of existing higher education facilities and making more college-level courses available to high school students.

Not surprisingly, the most appealing solution to the projected increases in enrollments is to use existing resources more effectively. Ninety-five percent favor "offering more classes in the evenings, weekends and over the summer to accommodate more students at existing campuses" (see Figure Seven). In other words, the public seems to be saying, "Use what you have before trying more expensive solutions." Although the survey did not probe this issue in detail, there are several possible reasons for its overwhelming popularity. On the one hand, people are deeply disturbed about government inefficiency and may be attracted to an efficient-sounding solution. Another reason may be that people believe that if a person really wants an education, he or she can go to school during the evening, on weekends, or at other inconvenient times. In other words, a motivated student can still get a college education.

Another very popular solution is to demand more from high school students so that they can complete some college work while still in high school and spend less time in colleges and universities as a result. Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed say they favor encouraging students to take more college-level courses while in high school.

The idea of high school students doing college-level work is consistent with public thinking on high school standards. In *Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform*, Public Agenda examined national attitudes towards K–12 education. Among the most conclusive findings of that study, and of many other similar studies, is the public belief that current standards are too low and that students will learn more and have a better experience in school if they are held to higher standards.

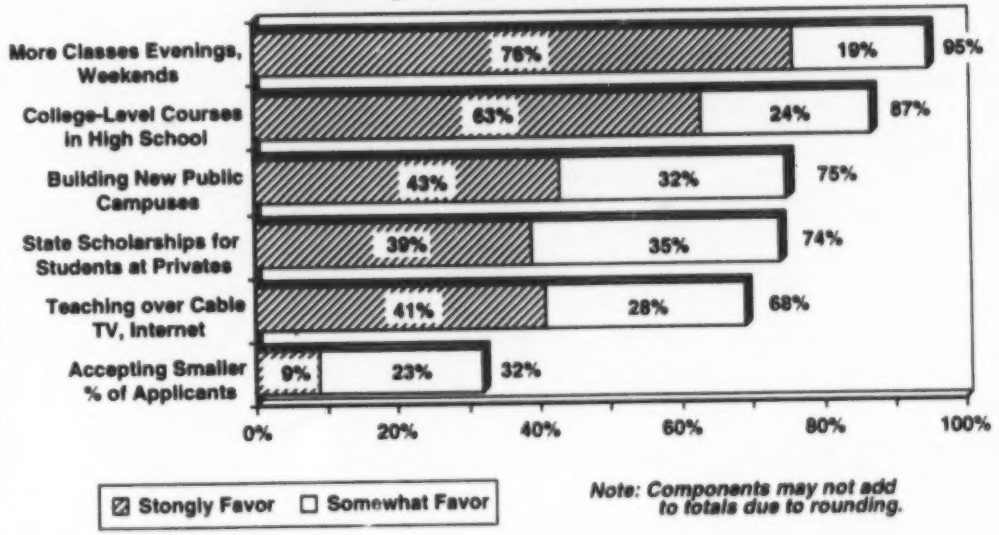
Seventy-two percent of Americans surveyed believe that "kids would actually learn more" if they were held to higher standards while in high school, and an equal percentage (71 percent) think they would pay more attention to their school work and study harder (see Table Ten). A Californian queried as part of *Enduring Values, Changing Concerns* said:

> *I don't think there is much stimulation from elementary school to high school to get the kids to learn. I think having more college-level courses would give them more motivation. They need to be more stimulated.*

Here again, this solution offers the greatest benefits to those students who are the most motivated. They will be the same students who do well in advanced courses in high school and save themselves money on their college education.

Figure Seven

Dealing with Tidal Wave II



Note: Components may not add to totals due to rounding.

Q: Suppose there were a lot more qualified people applying to California's public colleges and universities and not enough room for everyone who was eligible. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following proposals for dealing with this problem:

Offering more classes in the evenings, weekends and over the summer to accommodate more students at existing campuses.

Encouraging students to take more college-level courses in high school to get a head start, spending less time in college classes.

Building new public college and university campuses.

Letting eligible students use state scholarships at private colleges in order to free up space at the public colleges and universities.

Teaching classes over cable TV or on the Internet so that more students learn at home instead of on campus.

Accepting a smaller percentage of the people who apply to the public colleges and universities.

Table Ten

Support for Higher Standards for High School Students

Suppose the public schools set higher standards, and they also require kids to show that they have achieved those standards before they can graduate. Do you think that [INSERT STATEMENT]?	% ***responding "yes"***
Most kids would actually learn more	72%
Most kids would pay more attention to their school work and study harder	71%
More kids will dislike education and resist learning	38%

Source: Public Agenda, *Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform* (New York, NY: 1995). This report is based on a national telephone survey of 800 adults.

Finding Nine: Californians also support building new campuses, allowing students to go to private institutions, and using new technologies.

Several other posed solutions to the projected increases in enrollment are attractive to the public, but do not command the very high levels of support as those discussed above (see Figure Seven, page 17).

Although Californians clearly prefer to fully utilize existing campuses first, the idea of building new college and university campuses to absorb additional students commands support. Forty-three percent of the respondents strongly support the idea, and 32 percent are somewhat supportive. The survey did not explore the question of how such new campuses would be financed, which could lead to more qualified support. As one respondent said:

> *The idea of a new campus sounds great, but we would have to get a grant or something to pay for it.*

An equally appealing proposal is for eligible students to use state scholarships at private colleges in order to free up space at public colleges and universities. Seventy-four percent of those surveyed support this idea, although again the source of this financial aid was not included in the question. As with the proposal above, this idea protects access to higher education and enjoys solid support.

There is also interest in using new technologies such as the Internet and cable television to accommodate more students, with 68 percent of Californians saying that they strongly or somewhat support this approach. Sixty-four percent say they thought that technological innovation could usefully be employed in teaching, roughly the same level of support shown in the 1993 study (63 percent). One man thought that using the Internet might help students be more independent:

> *I think it would be smart to use the Internet. It would help the young person become more disciplined since he would have to learn something via the computer without a teacher standing around.*

Finding Ten: Californians favor supporting students rather than supporting institutions.

Traditionally, California has spent most of its educational dollar on institutions. An alternative would be to provide money directly to qualified individuals, letting them use those funds at any public or private institution. The public seems at least somewhat interested in this idea, with 52 percent saying that if the state government had more money for college education, it should "give that money to qualified students in the form of scholarships to use at the private or public college of their choice" (see Table Eleven). By contrast, 39 percent say that money should go to public colleges and universities.

Table Eleven
Extra Funding to Individuals or to Colleges and Universities?

Suppose the state had more money for college education:	*1996*
Should that money go directly to qualified students in the form of scholarships to use at the private or public college or university of their choice?	52%
—or—	
Do you think it would be better to give that money to the public colleges and universities?	39%

This may reflect an increased public tendency to see government and public institutions generally as wasteful and inefficient. When asked why he supported giving money directly to individuals rather than to colleges, one respondent in this study said:

> *If the money actually got where it was supposed to go, it would probably make more sense to give it to the schools, but there is so much government waste that who knows where the money will end up.*

Finding Eleven: For Californians, the least acceptable approach is limiting access.

The one solution that is clearly unacceptable to most people is to limit access. By two-to-one margins (61 percent to 32 percent), Californians say that they do not want to respond to greater demand for higher education by limiting the number of students who are accepted into the state's colleges and universities (see Figure Seven, page 17).

Finding Twelve: Who should bear the responsibility for necessary changes?

Californians are open to the proposition that universities and colleges should make changes, less receptive to the idea that taxpayers and state government should provide more funds, and completely opposed to asking students and their parents to pay higher fees.

To gain a sense of public thinking about which groups should bear the responsibility for necessary changes in California's system of higher education, the survey suggested three potential approaches: Students and their families paying more in fees, taxpayers and state government producing more revenue for higher education, and colleges and universities picking up the slack by making greater gains in productivity.

The least acceptable approach, from a public perspective, is for parents and students to pay more in fees. Californians seem less opposed to raising taxes on everyone than to requiring higher fees from students and their families. Seventy-two percent say students and their families are already doing all they can (see Table 12).

Respondents are evenly divided on the question of whether taxpayers and state government should devote more tax dollars to helping solve the problem. Forty-six percent say the state should devote more tax dollars while an almost equal percentage (47 percent)

Table Twelve

Who Should Take Responsibility?

To deal with an increase in students who apply and are eligible for California's public colleges and universities would mean that some changes and even sacrifices would have to be made. I'm going to mention several groups and ask if you think they should do more to help solve the problem, or if they are doing pretty much all they can already.	*1996*
Students and their families:	
They are doing pretty much all they can already	72%
They should pay higher fees to help solve the problem	23%
California's taxpayers and state government:	
They are doing pretty much all they can already	47%
They should devote more tax dollars to help solve this problem	46%
Faculty and administrators at the public colleges and universities:	
They are doing pretty much all they can do	40%
They should teach more classes and cut costs	50%

say that taxpayers and state government are doing about all that they can do. Public opinion findings on taxes are notoriously unreliable so this finding does not necessarily translate into reliable support for higher taxes. However, it does suggest that, in the abstract, higher fees are even more objectionable than higher taxes.

The only proposal to achieve a thin majority of support is the idea that faculty and administrators should teach more classes and cut costs. Fifty percent of those surveyed support this idea, while only 40 percent think that higher education has done all that it can do in this area. Some respondents complained about inefficiency in higher education. One woman said:

> *I attend an exercise program at one of the community colleges. Before I retired, I worked a 40-hour-plus week, but the teachers there only teach 20 hours a week. To me that is a gravy job.*

Another respondent said:

> *There is a lot of paper shuffling going on in the university, and a lot of memos flying back and forth, and not much getting done. It doesn't make sense to me.*

• • •

In conclusion, Californians seemed to have followed recent developments in their state's higher education system. They are strongly committed to accessible higher education for all who are sufficiently motivated to take advantage of the opportunity. Several years ago, when they perceived this access to be in jeopardy, they were ready to support a major restructuring of the state's higher education system. Now that the urgency of the problem has lessened, support for a radical solution has also decreased. But the warning remains loud and clear: Don't tamper with access.

Californians also tell us what solutions they will tolerate. Before anything else is done, they want the state to use its existing resources more efficiently and to expect greater achievement at the high school level. They are willing to support other ideas—more campuses, greater reliance on technology, or utilizing private institutions—but are unwilling to tolerate higher fees. Even tax increases are more popular than fee increases, although the public apparently wants to see changes from the universities first.

SPECIAL FOCUS

How Latinos View Higher Education

Historically, California's Latino population has had below-average rates of participation in the state's public higher education system. Does this mean that Latinos are less concerned about higher educational issues? The survey conclusively answers this question in the negative. Perhaps because of their low participation rates, California's Latinos are even more anxious about higher education issues than is the non-Latino population.

For example, Latinos are considerably more likely to see college as important. Seventy-eight percent of Latinos say that a college education is necessary for almost everyone, significantly higher than the percentage of non-Latinos (61 percent) who feel this way. And by an overwhelming margin of 84 percent to 10 percent, Latinos believe that high school graduates' job prospects will improve if they go directly to college after high school, rather than take "any decent job offer they get."

Latinos consider higher education so important because they see it as a real opportunity for low-income individuals (and minorities) to succeed in American society. When asked to rate the importance of various higher education goals, many non-Latinos say that giving people from low-income backgrounds opportunities to succeed is reasonably important, with 44 percent giving it the highest rating on a seven-point scale (see Table A). Sixty-one percent of Latinos, however, give this goal their highest rating. Not surprisingly, Latinos are also much more likely to consider opportunities for minorities as an important goal of higher education. Fifty-seven percent of Latinos give this goal the highest rating.

Table A
Latinos vs. Non-Latinos on the Importance of Specific Goals for Higher Education

To what extent do you think [INSERT GOAL] should be accomplished by a college education?

% rating goal a 7 on a 7-point scale where 7 means the goal is *extremely important*	*Latinos*	*Non-Latinos*
Exposing students to other cultures and teaching them to respect diversity	63%	45%
Giving people from lower income backgrounds opportunities to succeed	61%	44%
Helping turn students into good citizens	61%	50%
Giving minorities such as blacks and Latinos opportunities to succeed	57%	35%

Table B
Latinos versus Non-Latinos on Steps to Improve Access to Higher Education

% agreeing with following statements:	*Latinos*	*Non-Latinos*
It is a **poor** idea to "raise college prices even though some people argue the financial burden on families and students would be too high"	82%	62%
There are many people who are qualified to go to college but don't have the opportunity to do so	65%	50%
Government should give more loans and grants to qualified students who can't afford college prices even if that means spending on other services would have to be cut	56%	44%
Fees for California's public colleges and universities should be less for those with lower incomes	55%	42%
California's public college and university system needs to be fundamentally overhauled	53%	42%

compared to just 35 percent of the non-Latino population. Latinos also give a high priority to the ability of a higher education to make students more sensitive to other cultures.

Given their strong emphasis on the importance of higher education, it is hardly surprising that Latinos are even more concerned than the rest of the population about access to colleges and universities. Sixty-five percent of Latinos (as opposed to 50 percent of non-Latinos) believe that many people who are qualified to go to college do not have the opportunity to do so (see Table B).

This greater concern about access translates into greater support for steps to increase access. Latinos are significantly more likely than non-Latinos to think that the higher education system should be fundamentally overhauled and to oppose price increases. They are also more likely to support government loans and to feel that higher education fees should be based on a sliding scale so that low-income people pay less.

Thus, California's Latino population holds a more intense version of the views held by the population at large, believing that a higher education is extremely important and that access to higher education is not as widespread and equitable as it should be. Compared to the non-Latino population, they are even more supportive of steps to improve the situation, including a fundamental overhaul of the system. Since the Latino population is one of the fasting growing groups in California, it is likely that these attitudes may become more widespread in the years ahead.

Afterword

In *The Closing Gateway*, our first study of Californians' attitudes toward higher education, we noted a parallel between the way many Americans feel about health care and the way Californians feel about higher education. In both cases the public sees access as increasingly important, but as not at all guaranteed for them and their families. People are clearly worried there may come a time when they will need health care and the doors of the doctor's office, the hospital, or the nursing home will be closed to them. They also fear that their family (or a family very much like theirs) will have a highly qualified and motivated family member who cannot get a college education and hence is barred from a decent job and a comfortable lifestyle.

Without pursuing this analogy too far, the health care dilemma may also contain some cautionary advice for California's policy makers in higher education. Because health care practitioners failed to respond to the warning signs and take control of their own industry, others have done it for them. As Public Agenda President Daniel Yankelovich has remarked, "Today it is not at all uncommon to see a highly skilled physician with decades of experience fuming at the sidelines while critical decisions about a patient are made by a recent college graduate who works for an insurance company." The lesson for those who control such an essential public good as higher education, therefore, is to "solve your own problems before someone else solves them for you."

The findings suggest that if the state's public higher education systems do not respond creatively to the predicted challenges of "Tidal Wave II," the public's call for fundamental change could return with a vengeance.

Our research suggests an additional reason for policy makers in higher education to take this lesson to heart. Now that the economic crisis of the early 1990s has receded, Californians seem willing to give the state's higher education leaders some breathing room. For the moment, the pressure is off. But the findings also suggest that if the state's public higher education systems do not respond creatively to the predicted challenges of "Tidal Wave II," the public's call for fundamental change could return with a vengeance. A constituency for sweeping change might threaten the very essence of one of the world's most highly regarded public higher education systems. Thus, higher education leaders would do well to solve these problems while they retain a large reservoir of public support.

Deborah Wadsworth
Executive Director
Public Agenda

Methodology

This report is based on a telephone survey of 800 randomly selected residents of California. The survey instrument was designed by Public Agenda. Interviews were conducted between November 11 and November 20, 1996, and averaged approximately 21 minutes in length.

The respondents were selected through a standard, random-digit-dialing technique whereby every household in California had an equal chance of being contacted. Respondents were given the option of being interviewed in Spanish, and 17 interviews were conducted in Spanish. The margin of error for the 800 respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percent; the margin of error is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

Interviews were conducted by Robinson and Muenster Associates, Inc., of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Survey Sampling, Inc., supplied the sample. As in all surveys, question-order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes affect results. Steps were taken to minimize these, including randomizing the order in which some questions were asked. All interpretation of data in the report was done by Public Agenda.

In addition to the statewide telephone survey, a small number of open-ended interviews were conducted by telephone with respondents after the survey had been completed. Quotes were drawn from these interviews to give voice to the attitudes captured statistically through the survey.

The report also draws on findings from *The Closing Gateway* study, prepared by Public Agenda in 1993. That study was based on a similar telephone survey of 832 California residents, as well as a national survey of 502 residents of the continental United States. Eight focus groups with California residents were also held for that study.

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About Public Agenda

Founded over a decade ago by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues and to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view. Public Agenda's in-depth research on how average citizens think about policy forms the basis for extensive citizen education work. Its citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision-makers across the political spectrum.

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Related Publications by Public Agenda

Studies Prepared for The California Higher Education Policy Center

Preserving the Higher Education Legacy: A Conversation with California Leaders, 1995. John Immerwahr. A follow-up to *The Closing Gateway*, this report is based on a series of in-depth interviews with distinguished California leaders. Citing problems such as rising costs and declining access to higher education, the leaders call for "a public forum or public process that would generate statewide discussion of the issue." Available from The California Higher Education Policy Center, 160 West Santa Clara Street, Suite #704, San Jose, CA 95113. Ask for Report #95-3.

The Closing Gateway: Californians Consider Their Higher Education System, 1993. John Immerwahr with Steve Farkas. Striking findings about Californians' and other Americans' views on the importance and accessibility of higher education. Based on a random sample survey of over 800 California residents and eight focus groups across the state, as well as a survey of over 500 Americans nationwide. Available from The California Higher Education Policy Center. Ask for Report #93-6.

National Education Studies from Public Agenda

**Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools*, 1997. Public high school students are the focus of the national telephone survey which examines how teens view their schools, teachers, and the learning process. Includes insights into what students say would motivate them to work harder in school and how they define "good" and "bad" teaching. Special sections on African-American and Hispanic students, private high school students, and students from Kentucky and the San Francisco Bay Area are included. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $10.00.

**Given the Circumstances: Teachers Talk About Public Education Today*, 1996. Focuses on how public school teachers view the performance of the public schools; what children need to learn; and what schools need to be effective. A special focus on African-American and Hispanic teachers is included, along with a comparison of the views of teachers, the public, parents, and community leaders. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $10.00.

**Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform*, 1995. A follow-up study to *First Things First* (1994), this report examines why public support for public schools is in jeopardy; why Americans are so focused on the basics; whether people are really committed to higher standards; and whether they value education in and of itself. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $10.00.

**First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools*, 1994. Looks at how the general public, including parents of children currently in public schools, views education reform efforts as well as values issues in the schools. Included are detailed analyses of the perspectives of white and African-American public school parents, as well as parents identified as traditional Christians. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $10.00.

Additional Education Publications From Public Agenda

**Americans' Views on Standards: An Assessment by Public Agenda*, 1996. Prepared for the 1996 Education Summit, this assessment provides an in-depth review of Americans' attitudes toward higher standards in public schools. The report draws from Public Agenda's extensive archive of public opinion research on education—including surveys and focus group reports—and from studies by other prominent opinion analysts. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.

Committed to Change: Missouri Citizens and Public Education, 1996. Prepared by Public Agenda for The Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools, this report describes how Missouri citizens feel about public education. Gaps in perspectives among educators, community leaders, and the public, including a special focus on African-Americans, are outlined. Copies of the report are available from The Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools, 920A E. Broadway, Suite #203, Columbia, MO 65201-4858; (800) 659-4044.

**Attitudes Toward the St. Louis City Public Schools*, 1996. Examines the views of St. Louis residents, including parents with children in the St. Louis public schools, teachers and principals. Issues including safety, order, the basics, and higher academic standards are addressed. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.

**The Broken Contract: Connecticut Citizens Look at Public Education*, 1994. Prepared by Public Agenda for the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, this study describes how the citizens of Connecticut feel about public education and integration in their state and why they hold these attitudes. The gaps among educators, business leaders, and the public, including a special focus on African-Americans and Hispanics, are outlined. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $5.50.

**The Basics: Parents Talk About Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and the Schools*, 1995. A focus group study that explores the general public's concern with the basics. Examines differences in attitude between college and non-college educated parents. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.

**Professional Development for Teachers: The Public's View*, 1995. Examines the potential for both public support and disappointment with professional development for teachers. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.

**Accomplishing Reform with Public Engagement: A Map of the Process*, 1995. Prepared by Public Agenda in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, this map addresses citizens and community groups who want to undertake reform but believe the general public should or needs to be their partner for real change to occur. Roadblocks a community might encounter are flagged. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.

**Divided Within, Besieged Without: The Politics of Education in Four American School Districts.* 1993. Prepared by Public Agenda for the Kettering Foundation, this study of educators, education administrators, parents and business executives looks at the substantial in-fighting and communication gaps among these groups of education stakeholders. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $10.00.

Effective Public Engagement. 1993. Prepared by Public Agenda for the New Standards Project. This focus group report explores the views of teachers, parents, high school students and members of the general public toward higher standards. Copies are available from The National Center on Education and the Economy, 700 11th Street NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 783-3668. The report is $5.00 for New Standards Project partners, $25.00 for non-partners.

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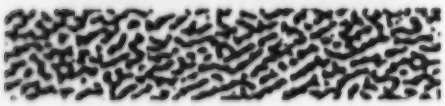

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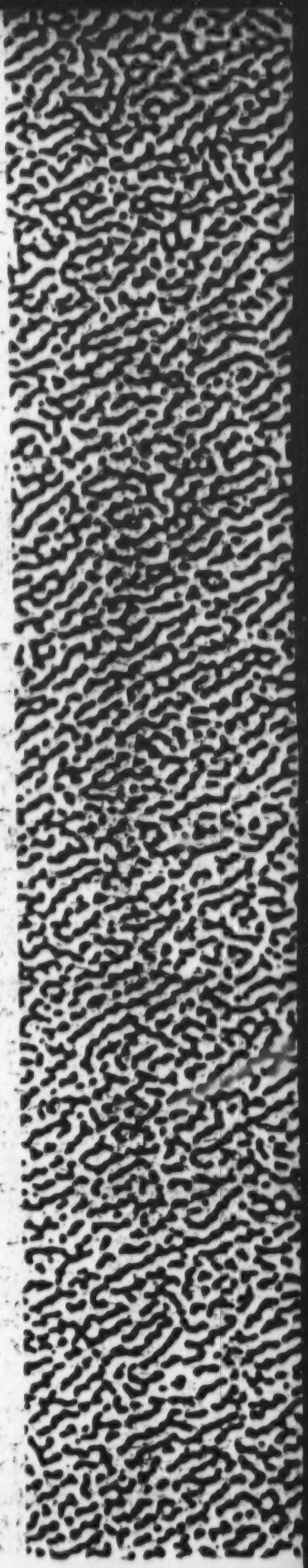

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